

Testimony for Public Hearing
House Human Services Committee
February 18, 2014

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House Bill #455: Generally Revise Medicaid Laws

Good afternoon Chairman Wittich and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Robyn Morrison; I am an ordained Christian minister with a Master of Divinity from The Pacific School of Religion. I am also a self-employed business owner and a part time Hospice Chaplain.

I am before you this afternoon to speak in opposition to HB 455 because it leaves too many honest, hard working Montanans' out. We cannot adequately predict how many lives will be lost because of the decision to exclude the people from Medicaid expansion that this bill excludes (in comparison to House Bill 249 - The Healthy Montana Act).

In preparing to speak to you today, I reflected on the wisdom and words of a great theologian, philosopher, **physician, and medical missionary**, Albert Schweitzer. In 1952 Schweitzer received the Nobel Peace Prize for his Reverence for Life.

"Ethics is nothing other than Reverence for Life. Reverence for Life affords me my fundamental principle of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, assisting and enhancing life, and to destroy, to harm or to hinder life is evil."

— Albert Schweitzer

Albert Schweitzer is also known for his work studying the historical Jesus. Albert Schweitzer once commented that many scholars who had searched for the historical Jesus had, in a sense, looked down into a well and seen themselves.

As a biblical scholar, theologian, and Christian ethicist, I understand the danger of trying to define Jesus, or God. Christians do not agree on the fundamental nature of Jesus or God. What we can be certain of is that Jesus was not a Republican or a Democrat. He was not a socialist, a communist, or a libertarian. The life and times of Jesus were not the same as ours. This is not the time of the Roman Empire.

We can't know what Jesus thought about Medicaid expansion. However, if we simply look at the gospel accounts of what he spent his time doing, and the stories he told, it is quite clear. The Gospels are filled with stories of Jesus physically healing the most vulnerable and despised people in his society.

Looking back on his life, he often acted as a healer. He seemed to delight in curing diseases, restoring disabled people to wholeness, and rewiring damaged minds. Health-care was in his

frame of reference. He never stopped to ask if they were employed, or whether they had children, or their age, or military status.

My favorite of the Jesus-healing stories is the one where a group of people rip open a roof and lower a friend into the presence of Jesus. I love how Jesus and the freshly healed man rolled up his mat and headed out the front door, walking unassisted for the first time in who knows how long. I wonder about all the people (including religious leaders) who crowded into that house and made it impossible for the man in his original condition of paralysis to get to Jesus in a more conventional way—through the front door. How does it happen that people rationalized, that the suffering guy outside should be left to his own devices?

Another famous story that Jesus told was the story of the man injured on the road to Jericho. The religious leaders passed by on the other side, but it was the stranger, the person of a different ethnicity and faith that crossed the road and tended to the wounded man.

Even during his life, his followers had other priorities and Jesus had to cut through their resistance - he was willing to be interrupted to respond to the cries of someone who was sick or dying.

The earliest followers of Jesus lived the example that Jesus taught them. In Acts 3, when Peter and John approach the Temple and spot a disabled man begging. There had been a time when they wouldn't have given him the time of day as they hurried on their way. But the healing love of Jesus had rubbed off on them. Now they noticed the victim. And in this case they stopped and took the time to heal the man.

What is my message as a Christian theologian and ethicist? Caring for the sick is an honorable thing for a society to engage in, it is precisely what Jesus did because the religious leaders of his time did not. More than that, it is not our place to judge that certain people are not deserving of access to health care. We also should not argue that we do not have the money to provide health care for all.

In Matthew 25: Jesus shocked his listeners by telling them that at the final hour of judgment, their salvation would depend on how they treated the least among them. His message was clear, whatever you do to the least of these, you are doing to Jesus. Would you deny Jesus because he didn't have a full time job or because he didn't have children?

Please vote NO on HB 455 and when the time comes, vote YES on HB 249 - The Healthy Montanan's Act.